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PROACTIVE E-MARKETING PLAN SHOULD BE IMPLEMENTED THROUGH STRATEGIC PLAN, AUGMENTATION OF SALES FORCE

By Business Writer June Wilhite

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Pharmaceutical companies can effectively implement e-marketing programs through strategic planning and by simply augmenting their traditional sales force, suggested Devin Paullin, vice president of operations at Physicians Interactive.

In a pre-conference workshop, Paullin outlined a 12-month strategy in which firms can proactively target physicians using electronic tools, or e-tools. He recommended that firms use traditional promotion solutions and modify those solutions using e-initiatives.

"You want [e-solutions] to be accepted as traditional so that they are used in the mainstream," Paullin said. "If you look in the industry, look at those folks who have created e-initiatives; a lot of those initiatives were started by folks who were traditionalists. They were people born and bred out of traditional pharmaceutical sales, and they said, 'Wow, here's a new tool and a new way that allows me to take the traditional things that I have always done and modify them, change them and win with them.'"

Among the first steps in developing an effective e-marketing strategy is establishing a vision, Paullin said. He suggested companies have a "discovery" process in which they outline their desired goals and anticipated challenges.

"When you are selecting [e-solutions], you should have a vision in mind before you go out and do it," Paullin recommended. "Draw yourself a picture, whether you do it physically or [mentally]; think of an integrated strategy."

After outlining what goals need to be accomplished through the e-marketing plan, companies should move forward and adopt the e-solutions, Paullin said. He stated that the 12-month e-marketing plan should incorporate a variety of e-tactics. "The trick is to use multiple solutions; things [that] complement each other," Paullin stated. "Don't continue using the same thing repeated one after the other; your message will get stale. Physicians might become uninterested."

Among some of the proactive e-marketing tools that Paullin recommended included e-detailing, convention interaction, eCME programs and promotional evaluation.

E-detailing, such as interactive e-surveys or opt-in email blasts, can help open doors for sales representatives, increase new prescriptions and increase product awareness and user loyalty, Paullin said. Convention interaction, meanwhile, allows reps to interact with physicians at various conferences, giving them the opportunity to leverage existing virtual detailing.

"To keep 'touching' physicians electronically, you have to be able to bring a variety of solutions to the table over a 12-month period of time," Paullin said. He noted that through all of these e-initiatives, the message to physicians should be consistent. He also said that these tools should be used to reinforce the traditional, face-to-face relationships with physicians. For example, information that is not supplied by sales representatives can be accessed online to supplement the physical interaction, Paullin suggested.

"Nothing is better than [sitting with the doctor] to have a conversation about a product. That's the best interaction we can get," Paullin contended. "[E-detailing] was never something that was designed to take the place of the sales force. It was designed [because] the sales force can't be everywhere and has challenges."

Paullin said the final step in an e-promotion plan should be developing a measurement system that tracks when and why the e-initiatives were successful or unsuccessful.

"It's not easy; cost is obviously an issue. But you want to study as often as you can or at least set some kind of regular process where many of the initiatives are undergoing some measurement process," he suggested. "You want to know if [the e-initiative] works or if it doesn't. You don't want to keep doing something that isn't making you money and not being able to do something that could."

In conclusion, Paullin said he expects e-detailing and other e-solutions to continue as low-cost alternatives for promoting products.

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